

## OASIS FOR GIRLS

### THE STORY:

Both Ly Nguyen and Jill Weinberg noticed a concerning trend during their first year of work at a SOMA teen center –girls rarely attended. Confused and frustrated, the women contacted youth organizations in the area only to find that the trend was similar throughout San Francisco. In hopes of reaching the root of the problem the women went to its source- low income and immigrant families living in the SOMA area.

Ly Nguyen and Jill Weinberg began Friday night social groups for young women in the basement of an affordable housing complex in order to meet and listen to the needs and concerns of low-income girls. They were met with enthusiasm as girls from India, South American, the Philippines and Russia poured into the room, ecstatic at the simple opportunity of “having something to do on Friday nights”. Through their Friday night social groups Nguyen and Weinberg found the answer they had been looking for: the girls explained that their lack of attendance at local youth centers was caused by their feelings of isolation due to boys’ tendencies to overpopulate and overshadow them in communal settings. In addition, many of the girl’s parents were reluctant to send their children to a co-ed program. In response, Nguyen and Weinberg created their own female-oriented youth group, OASIS, to provide girls living in the SOMA area with a safe haven free of gender politics, where they could learn and grow and play in comfort.



OASIS for girls, which stands for Offering Arts to our Sisters in Soma, addresses and supports low income and immigrant girls holistically by providing them with a variety of programs and resources at no cost, spanning from elementary school to high school and beyond. They offer arts and education programs, job and leadership training, as well as facilitating a number of internship and apprenticeship opportunities in San Francisco. OASIS programs aim to create strong and creative women who realize their full potential by living healthy lives while simultaneously positively impacting their communities. Furthermore, the programs focus on building leadership skills and strong relationships while emphasizing the importance and beauty of cultural diversity.

OASIS has answered the silent wishes of SOMA’s girls and their parents by providing them with a safe, fun and challenging space in which they share and learn from their diverse peers while simultaneously engaging in programs and leadership opportunities which push them to reach their full potential. The numbers speak for OASIS’ success: the program has experienced an annual growth rate of 26%, growing from just 52 girls in 1998 to its current membership at 150. Thus, OASIS has filled a deep void in the community by allowing less fortunate girls a place in which they can prepare for a “future in which all girls and women are educated and empowered to make healthy choices”.

### HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Help support Spark in its efforts to raise funds for OASIS for Girls by attending Spark’s Annual Global Gala: The Black and Pink Ball on October 12<sup>th</sup>, 2007 at the Julia Morgan Ballroom in San Francisco. Please visit [www.sparksf.org](http://www.sparksf.org) for more information.

Contact OASIS to learn about their work in empowering girls in SOMA. Please visit [www.sfoasis.org](http://www.sfoasis.org) for more information.